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South Korea: The Rise in Anti-US Incidents

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An Intelligence Assessment

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EA 85-10126
June 1985

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South Korea: The Rise in Anti-US Incidents

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [] Office
of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are
welcome and may be directed to the Chief, North
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**South Korea: The Rise in
Anti-US Incidents**

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 20 June 1985
was used in this report.*

Recent actions by student dissidents against US facilities in South Korea have President Chun as their ultimate target, but they also reflect a more questioning popular attitude toward the relationship with the United States:

- Many Koreans believe that their country is being treated unfairly in the economic arena and they resent what they perceive to be US interference in Korean political affairs.
- Neo-Marxist theories of "neocolonial" development have begun to color attitudes of some younger Koreans toward the United States.

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There is no evidence of a direct North Korean or other foreign hand in the anti-American activities of the past several months, even though the most extreme anti-US rhetoric parallels North Korean propaganda on some counts.

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A rising sense of nationalism is also contributing to tensions. Although the majority of South Koreans remain well-disposed toward the United States, fundamental social and economic changes are at work in South Korea that suggest a permanent change in attitude may be under way.

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Any sharpening of anti-US sentiments also holds serious domestic risks for President Chun, however. If senior military officers are convinced that Chun's unpopularity is at the root of anti-US actions, their concern over the threat posed to the security relationship with the United States could undermine the Army's support for the President.

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Over the next several years pressures on Seoul to assert its independence in foreign policy decisions will continue to grow as preparations for the Asian Games and the 1988 Olympics strengthen South Korea's sense of national pride.

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Significant Anti-US Incidents

2 October 1980	Four university students beat visiting US professor in racially and politically motivated attack. <input type="text"/>	25X1
9 December 1980	Kwangju American Cultural Center (ACC) firebombed by student dissident. <input type="text"/>	25X1
18 March 1982	Christian student dissident group firebombs ACC library in Pusan, killing one bystander <input type="text"/>	25X1 25X1
25 March 1982	Embassy learns of rumored plotting among student dissidents to assassinate US Ambassador. <input type="text"/>	
20 November 1982	Arson attack against Kwangju ACC; disgruntled worker confesses. <input type="text"/>	25X1
9 April 1983	Crude arson attempt at Kwangju ACC. <input type="text"/>	25X1
22 September 1983	Satchel bomb explodes outside Taegu ACC, killing student; analysis of second bomb suggests North Korean complicity. <input type="text"/>	25X1
29 November 1983	Homemade explosive device discovered in recreation center at Osan airbase. <input type="text"/>	25X1
14 October 1984	Telephone death threat against US Ambassador. <input type="text"/>	25X1
9 April 1985	Student protesters stone US Consulate and ACC in Pusan. <input type="text"/>	25X1
23 April 1985	Protesters stone three branches of the Korean-American Bank. <input type="text"/>	25X1
25 April 1985	Youth throws stones at US Embassy officer as officer leaves protest rally in Seoul. <input type="text"/>	25X1
6 May 1985	Demonstrating students stone clearly identifiable staff car carrying two US generals. <input type="text"/>	25X1
11 May 1985	Police thwart attempt by students to vandalize Kwangju ACC. <input type="text"/>	25X1
23-26 May 1985	Student dissidents occupy USIS library in Seoul, demand US admission of culpability in 1980 Kwangju incident. <input type="text"/>	25X1

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South Korea: The Rise in Anti-US Incidents

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The increase in anti-US incidents this spring, culminating in the student occupation in May of the United States Information Service (USIS) Library in Seoul, was timed by protesters to coincide with President Chun's April visit to Washington and the fifth anniversary of the Army's suppression of the Kwangju uprising. The pattern of protest is similar to the anti-Japanese events that coincided with Chun's visit to Tokyo last year. To a large extent the recent attacks on the United States have had Chun as their ultimate target, playing on nationalistic sentiments to find one more issue with which to mobilize protests against the President. The protesters sense that Chun's domestic position is weaker as a result of the parliamentary elections in February and the return to center stage of several outspoken political opponents.

In our view, several related trends in South Korean publications, popular opinion, and elite attitudes, however, suggest that opposition to Chun is not the sole motivation behind the rise in anti-US sentiment. Although the majority of Koreans remain well-disposed toward the United States, we believe that anti-US incidents also reflect a reappraisal of the US relationship that has become increasingly apparent in recent months:

- Newspapers and popular periodicals have sponsored numerous roundtable discussions about the negative impact of foreign—chiefly US—cultural and intellectual influences. Other discussions with a critical cast have focused on the behavior and intentions of US firms in Korea.
- An emotion-charged article in an influential news monthly by a US-educated sociologist called for an end to the “humiliating unrequited love” that Koreans have felt toward the United States during the past 40 years.
- Government-sponsored ideological training programs, including those under the New Village (Saemaul) movement and civil defense training, are

drawing on antiforeign—including anti-US—themes to promote patriotism and national consciousness.

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- Military officers are uneasy about Korea's continued security dependence and speak increasingly of a time—they generally specify 1991—when they anticipate that South Korea will be able to deter a North Korean attack alone, if need be.
- A public opinion survey sponsored by a leading newspaper in Seoul indicates that many Koreans empathize with critics of the United States. Nearly half of those polled believed that political and economic relations with the United States chiefly serve US interests. Younger, better educated, and higher income respondents, in particular, were prominent among those who expressed this view.

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There is nothing new in South Koreans taking the pulse of their relationship with the United States; this is a semipermanent feature of the Korean intellectual landscape. Nonetheless, the obvious and widespread unpopularity of the Chun government, the rise of a vocal opposition, and the clearly perceived—and publicly criticized—identification of US policy with Chun, in our view, makes this reappraisal of the bilateral relationship more worrisome than previous such efforts. There are other factors at work that suggest a real change in attitudes may be under way:

- Younger Koreans, who lack the personal memories of the US role in Korea's liberation in 1945 and in the Korean war, do not see the relationship through the prism of gratitude and good will.
- With rapid economic development, both younger and older Koreans regard their success at home and abroad in a variety of fields as reason for a more self-confident and aggressive nationalism.

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- In economic relations with the United States, the Koreans increasingly see protectionist threats directed at their exports as they move into higher technology industries.
- Social and economic change has increased the uncertainty with which university students—constituting one-third of their generation—view their own prospects for advancement, tying personal frustrations to perceived imbalances in South Korea's economic and political development. [redacted]

Finally, the historic sense of Korean vulnerability—as individuals and a nation—to domination and exploitation by stronger powers cuts both ways in its effect on attitudes toward the United States. On the one hand, this perception supports highly conservative, chauvinistic sentiments. On the other, recent events, such as the widely publicized allegation of US responsibility for the behavior of troops used to quell the insurrection in Kwangju, testify to the manner in which this insecurity predisposes Koreans to overestimate the degree of US influence in South Korean politics.

[redacted]

The Ideas Behind Anti-Americanism

The dissident writings we have examined suggest that nationalism and a sense of vulnerability, far more than North Korean propaganda themes, are at the root of the increased criticism. Even though the most vitriolic attacks mimic those in P'yongyang's propaganda on some counts, we do not believe North Korean agents are responsible for the language or for the tracts themselves. Many dissident slogans and themes, moreover, are inconsistent with P'yongyang's propaganda line—for example, equating Chun's "dictatorial rule" with that of Kim Il-song—and dissident tracts seen to date have not called for the withdrawal of US troops or lent support to other favorite North Korean initiatives.

[redacted]

Nonetheless, Marxist or "new left" ideology has begun to play some part in the expression of anti-US sentiments in South Korea. Although the intellectual atmosphere, particularly in the social sciences, is

largely influenced by US perspectives and approaches, in recent years neo-Marxist theories that draw parallels between colonialism and postwar patterns of economic development have had some influence on university students. Their speeches and pamphlets seem predisposed to view the US-South Korean relationship—as well as relations with Japan—as "neo-colonialist." [redacted]

Until a recent government crackdown on alleged "seditious publications," some academic neo-Marxist writings had been available in bookstores. More polemical tracts reportedly have wide circulation in student study groups. The most militant dissident groups (see appendix) now regularly call for the "liberation of the masses" and an end to "comprador capitalism." There also are signs of rising awareness of the antinuclear movement in the West; some church-affiliated youth groups have recently promoted the establishment of a domestic movement to protest the alleged presence of US nuclear weapons in South Korea. [redacted]

These developments notwithstanding, the appearance of more militant rhetoric does not indicate, in our view, a fundamental change in the ideology of the majority of university students. Indeed, in the aftermath of the USIS sit-in, there are signs that more moderate student dissidents will be less tolerant of efforts by the radical minority to dictate the themes and tactics used in protest actions. Over the longer term, however, the shared protest slogans and arguments could well leave a permanent imprint on attitudes toward the United States, even among those students who consciously reject neo-Marxist tenets.

[redacted]

Prospects

Both the Chun government and its critics have shown themselves ready to turn anti-US incidents to their own purposes. For example, government hardliners have claimed that the anti-US incidents demonstrate the need for tighter political controls to maintain "order and stability." Opposition leaders, on the other hand, have told US officials that only sweeping

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reforms—and a greater role for themselves—will prevent younger Koreans from becoming more radical and anti-American. In our view, Seoul is ready to manipulate and exploit public opinion, including anti-US themes, if it senses the need to stand fast in negotiating trade and other issues with Washington.

[redacted]

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But the tools of manipulation presented to the government by anti-US activism are greatly outweighed in importance by the dangers such protests pose. As is the case in Japan, leaders in South Korea are judged in large part by their ability to successfully manage the relationship with the United States. For the Koreans, this relates to preserving not only good diplomatic ties but also the security relationship. Should continuing—and perhaps escalating—anti-US protest activity seem to threaten this relationship, we believe Army support for Chun would weaken significantly. [redacted]

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Beyond the domestic implications, any sharpening of anti-US sentiment, whether or not accompanied by protest activity, could also have major significance for Washington's dealings with Seoul. In fact, as the widespread frustration over US involvement in Kim Dae Jung's return demonstrated (South Korean elites were as concerned as students), the South Korean populace already feels constricted by their country's need to consider US equities when deciding many issues, including those in the domestic political arena.

[redacted]

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We anticipate—particularly over the next several years as the Asian Games and 1988 Olympics strengthen South Korea's sense of national pride—that pressures to assert Seoul's independence in domestic and foreign policy decisions will grow. As a result, we anticipate that some heightened tension will mark the bilateral relationship, creating in turn more opportunities for anti-US protests. [redacted]

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Appendix

Dissident Groups Employing Anti-US Themes ¹

Federation for Mass Movement for Democratic Unification (FMMDU)

- Established 29 March 1985 through merger of National Council for Democratic Unification and Mass Democratic Movement Council; umbrella organization for several radical nationalist groups claiming total membership of some 220.
- Rev. Mun Ik-Hwan, FMMDU chairman, is characterized as "unification firster" by moderate dissidents; Kim Dae Jung and other dissident politicians have disavowed Mun's extreme views.
- Issued open letter to President Reagan (11 May 1985) denouncing US policy toward Korea over past 40 years for allegedly supporting dictatorial governments against the wishes of the people; alleges US bears responsibility for Kwangju incident and asserts "US" is the reason Korea has failed to achieve democracy.
- Paek Ki-Wan, chairman of FMMDU subcommittee on national unification and director of his own Unification Problems Research Center, is charismatic radical nationalist who exhorts campus audiences "not to trust anyone who speaks English, German, or Japanese," and advocates expelling Americans when the United States has finished providing economic and military assistance. [redacted]

Youth Federation for Democratic Movement (YFDM)

- Established in September 1983 by older former student dissident leaders; affiliated with FMMDU; also known as the Democratic Youth League; reportedly has some 200 members, including 40 core members, many of whom were imprisoned for political violations in the mid-1970s.

¹ This list excludes dissident organizations representing more moderate views and less antagonism toward the United States, such as the Council for the Promotion of Democracy jointly lead by Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam. In some instances, however, the radical members of these organizations may be affiliated with more extreme dissident groups or support anti-US statements or actions.

- Kim Kon-T'ae, YFDM chairman, has impressed US officials as intelligent, tough, and highly committed, as well as less rigid than the most extreme dissident elements. Kim is not openly hostile toward US officials, but claims the United States has double standard toward political developments in Third World.

- Members reportedly have helped students plan and organize protest actions and provide a bridge between student dissidents and social and political dissident groups. [redacted]

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National Federation of Student Associations (NFSA)

- Founded 17 April 1985; apparent successor to the General League of National Students (GLNS) established in November 1984; reportedly includes representatives of activist-dominated student associations at 42 universities.
- Chairman identified as Kim Min-Sok, chairman of General Student Association of Seoul National University; probably has several hundred core members and possibly several thousand peripheral members; includes radicals and moderates.

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- Provides intercampus coordination for protest actions, tighter network linking radical groups; [redacted]

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Three Peoples' Principles Association (Sammintu—Committee To Struggle for Nation, Democracy and the Masses)

- Established 6 May 1985 at Korea University; radical arm of NFSA; apparent successor to National Federation of Students for the Struggle for Democracy; police claim group has branches at 32 universities.

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- Chairman reported to be Ho In-Hoe, chairman of General Student Association of Korea University.
- Orchestrated USIS sit-in protest (14 of the protesters reportedly are Sammintu members); government claims group also responsible for sit-in at ruling party headquarters in December 1984 and numerous violent street demonstrations.
- Tracts assert that "workers are exploited by comprador capitalists who cater to American and Japanese godfathers"; reject proposals for cross-recognition of two Koreas by major powers as designed to perpetuate division. Government officials characterize members as antiforeign radical leftists or even pro-Communists. []
- Issued particularly venomous version of "Let's Call US Yankees From Now On" leaflet in early April; leaflet attacks—in North Korean-like jargon—import liberalization, cross-recognition, "Korea-US-Japan tripartite military cooperation," and "deployment of . . . Nuclear weapons designed to drive the Korean people into a whirlpool of extinction." []

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Ecumenical Youth Council (EYC)

- Dissident student group affiliated with more radical members of the Korean National Council of Churches; linked to other dissident Christian youth groups, such as the Korean Students Christian Federation and the General Federation of Catholic Students.

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Struggle Committee To Expose and Punish Those Guilty of the Kwangju Incident

- Collective designation initially used by USIS sit-in protesters; probably related to Committees for Measures for the Kwangju Incident established at several universities under NFSA auspices. []
- Suspected source of leaflets issued in the name of "Christian Youth"; themes include allegation that "Korea suffers under threat of nuclear war" tied to "comprador capitalism," opposition to port calls by nuclear-powered warships, and promotion of an antinuclear "peace campaign." []

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Committee for the Struggle for Democracy (Pusan University)

- May be linked to Three Peoples' Principles Association, although local police have characterized it as "nonleftist."
- Responsible for stoning of Pusan ACC and Consulate in April; scattered strongly anti-US leaflets entitled "Let's Call US Yankees From Now On" signed by Democratic Youth Student Federation of Pusan University (probably tied to NFSA). []

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Democratic Students of Chonnam University (Kwangju City)

- Presumably connected with, or identical to, General Association of Students of Chonnam University; may be linked to the Consultative Council of South Cholla Province for the Democratic Youth Movement.

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